

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 05833 131521Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O 131435Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4807
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 5833

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, MILI, PBOR, IS, LE, SY
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON

REF: STATE 218559

1. ASSAD HAS BEEN PERSONALLY DEEPLY INVOLVED DURING PAST TWO MONTHS IN NEGOTIATING AND OVERSEEING IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT WITH THE LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIPS. IN OUR OPINION AND WITHOUT TAKING UP SUBJECT DIRECTLY WITH SYRIAN LEADERSHIP, THE COMPROMISES WHICH WERE POSSIBLE HAVE BEEN MADE AND TO REOPEN THE QUESTION OF PLO POSITIONS SOUTH OF THE LITTANI WOULD DESTROY THE FRAGILE FABRIC OF THE AGREEMENT. SINCE, AS FAR AS THE SYRIANS ARE CONCERNED, THE ISRAELIS STAND TO COME OUT OF THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT BETTER OFF IN TERMS OF THEIR NORTHERN BORDER SECURITY THAN THEY WERE BEFORE THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR, ASSAD WILL PROBABLY SEE THEIR DEMANDS FOR FURTHER WITHDRAWAL AS A MANEUVER TO PROLONG THE FIGHTING AND TIE DOWN SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN FORCES. SYRIAN REACTIONS TO ANY SUGGESTION WE MIGHT MAKE RE NEGOTIATION OF MORE EXTENSIVE WITH-

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DRAWAL BY PLO FROM SOUTH LEBANON WOULD PREDICTABLY BE SHARPLY NEGATIVE AND WOULD DEFLECT ANGER ONTO THE U.S. OVER WHAT ASSAD PERCEIVES TO BE ISRAELI ARROGANCE.

2. ASSAD CONSIDERS ISRAELI ACTIVITY IN SOUTH LEBANON UNWARRANTED INTERVENTION INTO INTERNAL ARAB AFFAIRS. HE TACITLY RECOGNIZES ONE ROLE FOR THE U.S. IN THIS MATTER:

PERSUADING ISRAEL TO KEEP OUT OF SOUTH LEBANON. IF WE
APPEAR TO BE PASSING ON WHAT SYRIA WOULD CONSIDER PATENTLY
UNACCEPTABLE ISRAELI DEMANDS, ASSAD WILL TAKE IT AS FURTHER
EVIDENCE THE U.S. CANNOT OR WILL NOT STAND UP TO ISRAEL.
THIS ATTITUDE WILL COLOR HIS INSTRUCTIONS TO KHADDAM FOR
THE NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON TALKS, WORKING TO DETRIMENT
OF VALUABLE STEPS WE HAVE TAKEN TO KEEP OPEN IN HIS
MIND THE QUESTION OF OVERALL U.S. INTENTIONS TOWARDS THE
PEACE PROCESS. AT THIS POINT, WE DO NOT NEED TO DEEPEN
HIS MISTRUST BY APPEARING TO SUPPORT WHAT SYRIA AND THE
PALESTINIANS COULD ONLY SEE AS ISREAL GAINING AN UNDUE
ADVANTAGE IN SOUTH LEBANON.

3. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION RE EXTRACTION FEDAYEEN UNITS
INTRODUCED INTO LEBANON SINCE APRIL 1975. SYRIANS WILL
PROBABLY DO UTMOST TO KEEP LID ON THIS INFORMATION LOCALLY.
WE WILL, HOWEVER, TAKE LOW KEY SOUNDINGS WITH COLLEAGUES IN
CONTACT WITH PLO TO TRY TO DEVELOP SOME INFORMATION. OUR BEST
SYRIAN SOURCE WOULD BE COS SHIHABI BUT HE HAS NOT ACCEPTED REPEATED
REQUESTS FOR MEETINGS FOR OVER PAST TWO MONTHS, I.E., SINCE
INITIAL PREPARATIONS FOR SHTAURA TALKS.

4. I HAVE ASKED TO SEE ASSAD BEFORE RETURNING TO WASHINGTON
O/A SEPT 24. IF DEPARTMENT WISHES ME PURSUE ISSUE OF
SOUTH LEBANON WITH PRESIDENT, PLEASE ADVISE.

MURPHY

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NNN

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